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EU Press Reaction to European Parliament approval of GMO legislation

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Report Highlights:

On July 2, 2003 the European Parliament adopted new legislation on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) relating to labeling, traceability, and approvals. The press in the EU has declared the legislation as a major step toward ending the moratorium on GM foods in the EU.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
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[E2]

On July 2, 2003 the European Parliament voted through new legislation on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) relating to labeling, traceability, and approvals. The council must now approve the legislation before being officially adopted. The press in the EU has declared the legislation as a major step toward ending the moratorium on GM foods in the EU. In addition, EU officials and non-governmental organizations praise it as a win for consumer choice and environmental safety.

The legislation is touted as paving the way to ending the ban on GM foods, all food and feed products that are properly labeled can be approved and sold in the EU. A July 2nd BBC headline ran "Euro vote ends GM food ban." Similar headlines and articles appeared on CNN, Financial Times, Wall Street Journal Europe, and the European Voice to name a few major news sources.

Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner David Byrne touted the legislation as a victory for consumer choice: "[the EU] will now have the most rigorous pre-marketing assessment of GM food and feed in the world. Consumers will also have a clear choice of products to buy as GM food will now be clearly labeled."

Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström pronounced "it is a very important step towards full implementation of the EU legislation on GMOs." In addition, she said that the legislation will "provide a robust safeguard system" and also "reinforce the EU's international credibility and will certainly help in building public confidence in new technologies." The full statement of Commissioner Byrne and Commissioner Wallström can be found at the following link:

http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/03/935|0|RAPID&lg=en&display=

Additional advocates in terms of environmental concerns include Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. Friends of the Earth stated "this gives countries the power to impose strict restrictions on GM crops in order to protect organic and conventional crops" in reaction to an amendment on co-existence that allows member states to take "appropriate" measures to prevent unintended presence of GMOs in other products. Greenpeace took a harsher stance calling it a "slap in the face of the US administration which thought by bullying, Europe and eventually others would swallow its GMO policy." Greenpeace also called the new EU regulations "the world's strictest and most comprehensive rules on labeling of genetically modified organisms."

In terms of the United States reaction to the legislation, the press largely noted the existing case in the WTO led by the United States and backed by 12 other countries including Canada, Australia, and Argentina. The United States expressed that EU GMO regulations are not scientifically based and may constitute a technical barrier to trade in terms of the current WTO suit. On the whole, US officials and farmers are unhappy with the outcome citing that the cost of implementing the regulations is overbearing.

The legislation imposes strict labeling requirements on all food and feed products containing or derived from organisms with over .9 percent biotech material, even if the finished product does not contain any GMOs. Specifically, these products must be labeled with "this product contains genetically modified organisms" irrespective of whether the final good is packaged or unpackaged. In terms of co-existence, it also gives member states the right to take "appropriate" action to prevent the unintended presence of GMOs in other products. Relating to traceability, business operators are required to transmit and retain information concerning the presence of GMOs at each stage of the supply chain prior to placing on the market.

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